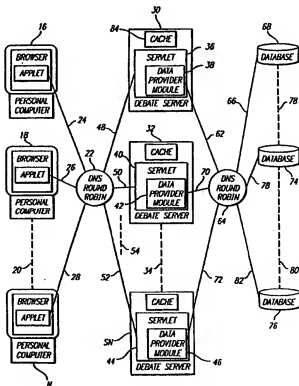




INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification : G07C 13/00	A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 00/17824
		(43) International Publication Date: 30 March 2000 (30.03.00)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/US99/21201 (22) International Filing Date: 15 September 1999 (15.09.99) (30) Priority Data: 60/101,053 18 September 1998 (18.09.98) US Not furnished 10 September 1999 (10.09.99) US (71) Applicant: DEBATES.COM CORPORATION [US/US]; Suite 300, 4676 Admiralty Way, Marina Del Rey, CA 90292 (US). (72) Inventor: BASUALDO, Ricardo; Uriburu 1001-San Isidro, 1642 Buenos Aires (AR). (74) Agent: ROBBINS, Billy, A.; Fulbright & Jaworski L.L.P., 29th floor, 865 S. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90017-2576 (US).		(81) Designated States: AE, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU; SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG). Published <i>With international search report.</i> <i>Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.</i>
(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR OBTAINING AND RANKING OPINIONS BY VOTES RELATED TO VARIOUS SUBJECT MATTER		
(57) Abstract A method and system providing the ability for a plurality of users to engage in intercommunication regarding a specific issue without a regard to geographic location. The individuals may agree or disagree with another individual's position taken with regard to an issue. Each individual may also determine how other individuals agree or disagree with his or her own position regarding a particular issue through ranking of the agreements on a computer screen in at least two dimensions. In addition, an individual may generate a specific issue upon which he or she wishes to engage in a communication exchange with others. Furthermore, each individual may also search a database to determine all of the issues which exist and upon which an interchange of communications is occurring according to various criteria, such as subject matter, author, date and the like. The system includes a database for storing the information, a personnel computer for use by the individual, a web server and means for interconnecting the database, the personal computer and the web server to provide for the communication, agreements, the ranking and to display the ranking on the personal computer.		



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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR OBTAINING AND RANKING OPINIONS BY VOTES RELATED TO VARIOUS SUBJECT MATTER

This application is based upon Provisional Application Number 60/101,053
5 filed September 18, 1998 entitled SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR OBTAINING
AND RANKING OPINIONS BY VOTES RELATED TO VARIOUS SUBJECT
MATTER.

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to communications through the
10 utilization of a computer and the infrastructure of the Internet or an Intranet and more
particularly to the utilization of a computer program to provide individual users an
opportunity to express their opinions regarding defined subject matter or to signify
agreement with other's opinions relating to such subject matter and to then rank the
opinions relative to each other according to the number of agreements which each
15 such opinion has received and to display such ranking.

Background of the Invention

It has long been desired to sample opinions of various individuals related to
particular subjects matter and to utilize the data generated by such sampling for
various purposes. Typically, as is indicated in prior art U.S. Patent 4,345,315, these
20 sampling techniques utilize an electronic terminal which displays various questions,
for example directed to the quality of a service provider, and requests the user to
indicate his or her level of satisfaction with respect thereto. A similar such opinion
sampling apparatus is shown in prior art U.S. Patent 3,689,930. In some instances, for
example, to obtain public opinion polls, various messages relevant to a particular
25 issue are gathered and then submitted to users to determine their positions with regard
to those messages. These positions are then sorted and tallied to form a poll and to
predict various positions of the public with respect to issues related to the messages
presented. Various complex formulas and algorithms are utilized to accomplish this

task and the results are provided for use by various organizations for various purposes.

In other instances there has been used an interactive electronic apparatus for the purpose of user polling or testing or for message delivery, or for re-enforcement of information, or for didactic purposes. In these systems such as shown in prior art

- 5 Patent 4,234,933 visual material is presented to a user and the user then reacts thereto by way of entries from a user activated input device such as a key pad, mouse, or the like. Typically these devices are used for preference sampling, educational test achievement or level, or in game playing. The material presented to the user in these interactive applications is normally fixed by the presenter.

- 10 Applicant is unaware of any prior art system or method which permits a plurality of individuals to engage in a debate regarding a specific issue, without regard to geographic location, and to ascertain how other individuals agree or disagree with that individual's position through ranking of opinions on a computer screen in at least two dimensions. The present invention provides a system and method whereby an
- 15 individual may obtain the opinions of other individuals with regard to predetermined issues, read those opinions and then express agreement or disagreement with respect to those opinions. In addition, the individual after reading the opinions of others with respect to a particular issue may then generate his or her own opinion regarding the issue in question and then submit that opinion for reading by others who may then
- 20 designate their agreement or disagreement therewith. Such a system truly allows individuals to engage in interactive debate on issues of interest to them.

- The agreements or disagreements which are registered with regard to each opinion respecting a particular issue are instantaneously tallied. The number of specified agreements with a particular opinion are then compared to the specific
- 25 agreements with respect to all of the other opinions relative to the particular issue and all of these various opinions directed to a particular predetermined issue are ranked according to the number of agreements therewith. The ranking is then displayed upon the computer screen in at least two dimensions which when taken together determine the relative ranking of each opinion with respect to all of the other opinions directed
- 30 to that particular issue and will also indicate that opinion which has received the

greatest number of agreements.

Each of the opinions is represented on the computer screen by a symbol or element which can take any geometric form desired. These symbols also appear grouped within an additional geometric format which again may take any particular form desired such as a triangle, circle, square, cube, hexagon, stepped pyramid, or the like. As will be seen from discussions herein below a preferred form is a pyramid or triangular shape (with the base at the bottom) with each of the opinion symbols also being in the form of such a pyramid or triangle. To provide further information with respect to each of the opinions the symbol representing that opinion may be assigned a predetermined color. The colors assigned can indicate various information such as, for example, that opinion has been read and agreed with, that opinion has been read and disagreed with, that opinion is an unread opinion, or that opinion is the opinion of the individual viewing the information on the screen at that time. As can be seen, these colors provide information which is unique to that user with regard to what he or she has done with respect to each of the opinions shown on the screen with regard to the particular issue of concern. In addition, in the event that there are insufficient opinions with regard to the particular issue of concern, so that all of the opinion symbols appearing on the screen receive some color, then any remaining opinion symbols are left blank or transparent and thus only the background appearing on the screen behind the symbol shows through until such a time as another opinion is rendered and occupies another symbol.

By utilization of the opinion symbols appearing on the screen the user may by moving the cursor to a particular opinion symbol have displayed immediately on the screen an abstract of that particular opinion. Merely by moving the cursor to a different opinion symbol a brief or abstract of that opinion is immediately shown on the screen. Thus by merely positioning the cursor on an opinion symbol the brief of that opinion is shown. If the user desires to obtain the full opinion, then the user may merely click the mouse on that opinion symbol, the brief of which is displayed, to receive the full opinion. Thus, and with very simple and uncomplicated interaction between the user and the computer, the status of the various opinions as to whether they are read, unread, agreed with or disagreed with, or are the user's opinions, is

displayed and any unread opinions can be briefed and then the full opinion obtained with ease. The user is also provided with the ability of recalling any opinion which the user has read and agreed or disagreed with and changing the agreement or disagreement. By such change the relative rank of the opinion may be also changed.

- 5 With the method and system of the present invention the user is provided the ability to search all of the debates which exist according to various criteria. The search may be conducted by subject matter, author, date, my debates (those debates created by the user) new debates and any combination of these criteria. Depending upon the criteria of the search, pull-down menus are provided from which the user
- 10 may select. If the user, for example, wishes to search by subject then the user is provided with a pull-down menu listing a multiplicity of nouns. The user then can select a combination of up to four nouns which would define a subject matter and an area for the debate of interest. The computer software program then queries the database containing the information regarding the various debates for existing debates
- 15 with titles which would match one or more of the up to four nouns selected by the user. If the query does not find any debate which matches any of nouns then the user is so notified and is given the opportunity to select different nouns or to actually create the users own debate subject matter. By doing this the user is now in a position to voice his or her own opinion with regard to the debate subject matter which has been
- 20 generated by the user and to thereby find out if this subject matter is of interest to other users to a degree such that they would agree or disagree with the user's opinion or alternatively would generate their opinion and place the same in the system.

- The user interconnects to the web server from a personal computer connected to the Internet or an intranet through a web browser (Netscape Navigator or Microsoft
- 25 Explorer for example) and requests a web page which includes a call to a debate Java applet. The web server downloads the debate applet thus causing the personal computer and its browser to become a virtual machine that runs the debate applet. The main function of the applet is to display the debate user interface and to communicate with a debate servlet to execute within a JVM (Java Virtual Machine).
- 30 The servlets handle the communications with the applets, program logic and send read and write requests to the database server through a JDBC (Java Database

Connectivity) driver. The database utilized is a relational database that stores all the information regarding various debate users, such as geographic location, sex, race, religious background, age, income and the like, as well as subjects, opinions, votes and the like. The combination of web server, Java server and debate servlets

- 5 constitutes a debate server. The debate server also extracts certain of the information which exists in the database such as opinion briefs, ranking, author and the like and stores it in a cache at the debate server. Some of the information is also placed in the browser cache in the user's personal computer. As a result of the foregoing the user can display information about a debate without requiring retrieval of information from
- 10 the database thus making the interaction between the user and the debate application as fast as possible. The database need only be accessed in the event that the users activity requires an updating of the database such as by voting or adding an opinion or if the user requests the full text of an opinion.

- By utilization of the user web browser, a web server and the database server
- 15 and particularly through the use of the Servlets and Applets, the system may be scaled to handle a multiplicity of users, a multiplicity of web servers and a multiplicity of database servers if the demand by users for the debates program is extensive.

Summary of the Invention

- A system and method for ranking opinions within a predetermined defined
- 20 subject matter and by displaying information related thereto on a computer display screen which includes establishing defined subject matter upon which opinions may be rendered, identifying individuals who are qualified to have access to those opinions, allowing such individuals to access the opinions, to read the opinions and to specify an agreement or disagreement therewith, then comparing each agreement with
- 25 each opinion with agreements with every other opinion related to the subject matter and then ranking all of the opinions relative to each other according to the number of agreements and displaying such rankings on the computer display screen in at least two dimensions.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figures 1A through 1E are illustrations of two and three dimensional opinion ranking shapes which may be displayed on the computer screen.

Figure 2 is a simplified schematic illustrating the fundamental components of the system of the present invention;

- 5 Figure 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating in more detail a system in accordance with the present invention which utilizes a multiplicity of users, servers and databases;

Figure 4 is an illustration of a screen showing the debates home page;

- Figure 5 is a flow chart illustrating the entry by a user into the program; and
10 showing the setup as required;

Figure 6 illustrates the computer screen which is used in the setup step;

Figure 7 is a flow chart illustrating the search capability of the program;

Figure 8 is an illustration of a computer screen illustrating various search criteria available;

- 15 Figure 9 is an illustration of a computer screen showing a pull down menu with regard to certain search criteria;

Figure 10 is a flow chart illustrating the search by subject capability of the program;

- Figure 11 is a flow chart showing administration and deployment of debates
20 and opinions with respect thereto;

Figure 12 is an illustration of a computer screen illustrating a brief and a full opinion which may be selected utilizing the flow chart of Figure 11;

Figure 13 is a flow chart showing further administration and deployment with regard to opinions which have been selected;

- 25 Figure 14 is an illustration of the computer screen showing one manner in which the opinions may be displayed and ranked;

Figure 15 is a flow chart illustrating the search by author portion of the program;

Figure 16 is a flow chart showing the search by date portion of the program;

- 30 Figure 17 is an illustration of a computer screen providing a custom search by date entry by the user; and

Figure 18 is an illustration of a computer screen displaying a list of debates found by a search.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring now to the drawings and more specifically to Figures 1a through 1e there is illustrated various alternative formats which may be utilized as a geometric configuration to provide an illustration on the computer screen which ranks the debates in two dimensions. As is indicated for example in Figure 1A there is shown a rectangle which has been divided into a plurality of sections by vertical and horizontal gridlines. The opinion which appears in the upper left hand corner would be ranked as the opinion having the most agreements of all of the opinions with respect to a particular debate subject matter which is of interest to the user and the opinions of which have been requested by the user. The ranking of the opinions, for example would be accomplished in descending order line by line as illustrated in Figure 1A.

An alternative geometric configuration is shown in Figure 1B which is in the form of a step pyramid suggestive of the pyramids generated during the Mayan culture dominance in Mexico, Central and South America. Utilizing this geometric configuration it also may be divided into a plurality of sections by vertical and horizontal lines with each of the sections representing an opinion. The opinion residing in the upper most block would be the opinion which has the most agreements of all of the opinions with regard to the particular debate subject matter of interest to the user.

As shown in Figure 1C a pyramid configuration or a triangle with the base at the bottom may be utilized. The pyramid shape shown in Figure 1C is again sectionalized by lines drawn parallel to each of the three sides of the pyramid to thus create a plurality of additional pyramids or triangles within the two dimensional pyramidal shape. As is illustrated, each of the internal pyramids or triangles represent an opinion with the uppermost one being the opinion having the most agreements of all of the opinions which have been generated with respect to the subject matter which is of particular interest. The rankings are then noted in a descending order on a line by line basis as indicated by the numbers 1 through 9.

In Figure 1D there is illustrated a plurality of concentric circles which may form an additional geometric configuration within which debates may be ranked in a two dimensional manner. The concentric circles are divided by radial spokes into segments with each segment representing an opinion. The opinion at the center of the concentric circles will be the opinion having the most votes of all of those opinions which have been generated and which relate to the subject matter of interest to the user. The opinions may also then be ranked in a clockwise descending order as indicated by the numbers 2 through 12. Obviously, the ranking may be accomplished in other fashions utilizing the concentric circles, such for example, in a counterclockwise fashion, radially outward or the like.

By reference now to Figure 1E there is illustrated a cube which has been sectioned to provide a plurality of additional cubes and would permit ranking in three directions with the opinion having the most agreements being positioned in the upper left hand corner and the remaining opinions then being ranked in a descending order on a line by line and column by column basis and then subsequently in the third dimension from the front toward the rear of the three dimensional cube like grid as shown in Figure 1E.

Irrespective of the geometric configuration chosen to be displayed on the computer screen to provide a visual ranking of the opinions to the user it can be seen that the ranking is accomplished visually on the screen in at least two dimensions in each case. That is, the opinions are ranked both vertically and horizontally in the geographic configuration shown in Figures 1A, 1B, 1C and 1E and are ranked toward the center of the circle and around the center of the circle when concentric circles are used as is illustrated in Figure 1D. As is also illustrated with regard to Figure 1E an additional dimension may also be added to the ranking if such is desired. The main purpose of these geometric configurations and the utilization of the segmentation thereof is to provide an instantaneous illustration for use by the user showing the number of opinions which have been generated with regard to the subject matter of interest and to tell the user which of those opinions has received the most agreements, the next most, the next most after that and so forth with regard to each of the opinions upon which votes have been cast. This will provide some guidance to the user as to

which opinion the user wishes to access first. As was indicated above and will be discussed more in detail hereinafter each of the symbols representing an individual opinion may also be color coded to provide yet further information to the user such, for example as to whether he has already read the particular opinion, not read it, agreed with it, whether it is his opinion or the like. This would also provide further guidance to the user to enable him in selecting which of the opinions he or she wishes to access at the particular instance.

Referring now more specifically to Figure 2, there is shown in schematic diagram the general concept of a system which may be utilized in the debates program which is the subject matter of this invention. As is shown, the architecture provided is three tiered which provides advantages such as universal access, extensibility and application scalability. The computer program in accordance with the present invention may be used in any system using any operating system or code desired. However, the presently preferred system is Java and the following description is given with respect thereto. As is shown, the first tier includes the client personal computer 10 which includes a web browser 10A. The term client may be used throughout this specification interchangeably with the term user. As is well understood in the art, each user of a personal computer who is on the Internet has included as part of the software, a web browser. Preferably the web browser most desirable in accordance with the principles of the present invention is one that is a Java enabled browser. Through the utilization of the web browser, the hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) software is available which enables direct communication over the Internet.

The second tier is a debate server which includes a web server 12 which runs Java Servlet. The Java Servlets is capable of handling program logic and database access. At the present time most commercial web servers support this feature of utilizing Java Servlets and particularly those web servers identified as Netscape Fast Track, Enterprise Server, Fast Cap, Sun Web Server and Apache. When the client initiates contact with the web server through the Internet or Intranet 11 and logs on to the debates program the web server 12 communicates Java Applets to the client web browser 10A. Subsequent to the transfer of the Java Applets, the client web browser 10A for all intents and purposes becomes a virtual machine capable of executing the

debates program. The user through the web browser and the computer mouse or keyboard (not shown) will communicate commands, requests and queries to the web server 12 between the Applets and Servlets. The web server Java Servlets will then communicate with the third tier which is the database server 14 to store therein or

5 extract therefrom the data and information which is being generated or requested by the user. The Java Servlets can access information in the database through Java Data Base Connectivity (JDBC) standard API (Application Program Interface).

An important feature of the web server 12 is that the Java Servlets is loaded once when it is called and stays resident in the memory. Static or persistent

10 information can be stored in a cache 12A and shared across multiple invocations of the Servlets therefore allowing access to this information without accessing the Database. A servlet may have unique features like interservlets communications as well as the ability for one servlet output to be connected as an input to another servlet. In the architecture as shown in Figure 1 a critical feature is the web server 12. The

15 web server 12 has a number of extremely desirable characteristics. One of these characteristics is that it provides distributed execution based on the modular design of the components. For example one Servlet can be programmed to have specific features which can be run in a dedicated server as a way to distribute the load. As an example, such Servlet can be implemented with spell checking capabilities to search

20 for offensive words or expressions which could possibly find their way into an opinion which a user is attempting to post with respect to a particular debate. Also, such a Servlet could be programmed to do simple word processing or to handle such items as making characters bold, in italics, or to underline characters, words or the like. Another characteristic of the web server 12 is its scalability.

25 Referring now to Figure 3, there is shown a schematic diagram and expanded architecture illustrating a number of users, a cluster of servers and a plurality of databases. Servlet engines can be added to the architecture. The only requirement is that it be incorporated into whatever balancing scheme is being utilized in the system as will be described more fully below. Through the utilization of the balancing

30 scheme and the added Servlet engines, the architecture may handle increasing numbers of simultaneous user requests by spreading the work between the servers in

the cluster. Since Servlets are stateless, that is they do not care what server they are on, they can easily be hosted on any engine within the server cluster and still perform properly. A further feature of the web server is that only one instance of a Servlet is loaded and thereafter it can handle many simultaneous requests through multiple

5 threads. This dramatically minimizes the work load of the server. With prior art type applications such as Perl scripts, C, or C++ a new process is created for each request thus slowing down the communication and generating dramatically larger work loads. The purpose of the illustration in Figure 3 is to demonstrate the scalability of the architecture to provide the ability to server large numbers of users simultaneously. As

10 illustrated in Figure 3, a user may have a personal computer having a browser with the Applet and an appropriate keyboard or other inputting device as shown at 16 and at 18. There may be any number of such users as is illustrated by the user N and the dashed line 20 interconnecting the users 18 and N. Each of these user units are interconnected to a balancing or distribution device 22 as indicated by the

15 interconnections 24, 26 and 28. Obviously, there would be additional interconnections up to N such interconnections. The balancing device 22 may be any known to the art which is capable of routing requests from users to the servers in order to distribute the load thereby preventing overload of any one portion of the system and thereby slowing down communication with the users. The preferred such balancing

20 device is DNS Round Robin. Other such devices known to the art are Websphere, Jaguar and Tengah. Websphere is a trademark of IBM, Jaguar is a trademark of Sybase and Tengah is a trademark of Weblogic for such devices. As is also illustrated in Figure 3 there are a plurality of servers as shown at 30, 32 and SN with the dashed line 34 connected between the server 32 and the server SN thereby indicating that

25 there may be N such servers. Within each of the servers there is a Servlet 36 and a data provider module such as shown at 36, 40 and 44 for the servlets in server 30, 32 and SN and at 38, 42 and 46 for the data provider module respectively in the servers 30, 32 and SN. The DNS Round Robin 22 receives communications from the user browsers 16 through N and then by determining which server 30 through SN is

30 available and was not last contacted will then transmit the request from the user by way of the connections 48, 50 and 52 to the desired and appropriate Servlets 36, 40

and 44. Obviously, there will be sufficient connections as indicated by the dashed line 54 between the lines 50 and 52 to provide appropriate communications to the servers depending upon the number SN thereof. As user requests that require access to the Database are received by particular servlets for example Servlet 36, it will

5 communicate with its data provider module 38. The data provider module is then connected by the connection 62 to an additional DNS Round Robin balancing device 64 which in turn is connected through a connection 66 to a database 68. Clearly the servers 30, 32 through SN are connected to the DNS Round Robin 64 by connections 62, 70 and 72. It should be recognized that there may be additional databases as

10 illustrated at 74 and 76. Typically, these databases are a mirror image of the database 68 as is indicated by the dashed lines 78 and 80. The mirrored database 74 is connected to the DNS Round Robin 64 by the connection 78 while the mirrored database 76 is connected thereto by the connection 80.

It will be understood by those skilled in the art that a multitude of

15 communications received from a large number of users 16 through N may be received simultaneously on the DNS Round Robin 22 and will be distributed by it to particular Servlets in sequence. The Servlets will communicate through the data provider module with the database to record the information being generated or to provide the information which is being requested by the user or to otherwise process the data as

20 will be described more fully below. Certain types of information which will remain static may be extracted from the database and placed in a cache, for example as shown at 84, which may be directly accessed by the Servlet 36 and provided to the users browser, for example at 16. That information may also be retained and cached in the users browser depending upon the particular applications and the program. Such

25 information would, for example be the opinion briefs, the noun look up tables, the relative positions of the various opinions, with respect to each other and the like. As a result, that type of information is readily available to the user without a communication being directed to the database to retrieve it. Thus, the communication between the Servlets, the data provider module and the database will basically be

30 reserved for those situations where the user is voting, that is showing agreement or disagreement with respect to a particular opinion or is writing a new opinion, to be

posted in the database, or is conducting a search for a particular opinion by subject matter author, date or the like.

- When the user accesses the web server through either the Internet or an Intranet and accesses the debates program such, for example, as logging on to the Internet with Debate.com, the first thing which appears on the users screen is the home page which, for example, may appear as is illustrated in Figure 4 to which reference is hereby made. As is noted on the home page, there is the identification of the program and the ability to obtain information about debate, to SETUP (or Register), to ENTER the program, view the RULES and then to EXIT the program. If an individual has already registered and is thus an identified and qualified individual he or she may participate in the Debate program by clicking on the ENTER bar 96. However, unless an individual has already registered, that individual will not be permitted to enter the program because he or she is not identified and qualified to do so. Therefore, if that individual does wish to continue, the individual must first click on the SETUP bar 88. However, before doing the SETUP the individual may wish to learn more about the Debate program, in which event the individual will click on the ABOUT US bar 86. This may provide sufficient information to intrigue the individual to then become interested further in finding out about what the rules of debate may be and under these circumstances the individual may then click on the RULES bar 92. Once the individual has found the information about the program and has obtained information about the rules, if the individual does not wish to participate in the Debate program then the individual may click on the EXIT bar 90 and depart the program without further action. However, if the individual does wish to participate in the Debate program, after viewing all of the above-referred to information, the individual would click on the SETUP bar 88 to which reference is made.

- When the user clicks on the set up bar 88 a set up screen as illustrated in Figure 6 will appear and the Debate program will function as is illustrated in the flow chart of Figure 5. As is shown in Figure 5 when the set up bar 88 is clicked on it will cause the set up screen 100 to appear as is shown in Figure 6. The user is then required to insert his or her name, alias, personal data, server and password which is

then stored in the user's computer as shown at 103. When such is accomplished the computer returns to the home page 105. The user may then, because he has properly registered and if a password has been e-mailed to the user, the user may enter the Debate program by pressing the enter bar 96 on the home page as shown in Figure 4.

- 5 On the other hand if the user is not desirous of engaging in the Debate program at this point he or she may click on the exit bar as shown at 90 in Figure 5 and at the home page on Figure 4 and will exit the program at that point.

- The actual SETUP information which appears on the users screen is shown in Figure 6. As is therein shown, the user is requested to insert his or her first and last
10 name, his or her birth date, the country in which the user resides, the zip code within that country where the user resides and the gender of the user. The user is also requested to provide his or her e-mail address. As is also noted on the screen at 101 on Figure 6, there is provided a place for the individual to insert an alias if that individual desires to do so. This option is provided because in many instances an
15 individual would be desirous of expressing an opinion and having that opinion posted for others to view on the Internet but may be somewhat reluctant to initially accept responsibility for the position which is stated in the opinion. Therefore the user, if he or she desires, may select an alias by which that user may sign opinions in the future. Also displayed on the screen during the SETUP stage are settings which indicate that
20 the Internet or Intranet address of the server to be accessed is Debate.com and there is also provided a place for the user to insert the user's password which will be used in the future for access by that particular user to the debate program. The password, as is the case with regard to many such programs, may be any series of numbers or letters desired by the user up to the maximum number permitted in that field, for example,
25 eight characters or numbers or a combination thereof. In the case of an Internet implementation, this password can be sent to the user via e-mail after being automatically generated by a server. Once all of the information has been entered on the SETUP screen as illustrated in Figure 6 the user would click on the "OK" symbol in the lower left hand corner of the screen and would then be registered and become
30 an individual identified as qualified to have access to the Debate program and to render opinions, generate debates or the like in accordance with the rules for Debate.

If, however, once the information is entered the individual changes his or her mind and does not wish to continue, he or she may hit the "cancel" button which appears in the lower right hand corner and then the EXIT bar 90 on the home page (Figure 4) to depart the program. Assuming that the user has entered the data and wishes to
5 continue and has activated the "OK" button, as shown in Figure 6, the information is stored in the users computer as shown at 103 (Figure 5) and the screen is returned to the home page, as shown in Figure 4. The user may now activate the ENTER bar 96 to commence participation in the Debate program. When the ENTER bar 96 (Figure 5) is clicked the Debate program displays on the user's screen a search application as
10 illustrated in Figure 8 to which reference is hereby made. The program function at this point is illustrated by the flow chart of Figure 7.

As is shown in Figures 7 and 8, the user is provided the ability to find ongoing debates by several criteria. As is illustrated, the user may search by subject, by author, by date, by my debates, by new debates and by the hottest debates. The user then will
15 decide which of these criteria is to be used to search for debates in which the user is interested at the present time. The user would then click on, for example, by subject on the screen (Figure 8) which would activate the subject block 106. When such occurs, the subject search criteria is placed on the user's screen 108. The subject search screen is shown in Figure 9.

As is shown by the user's screen represented in Figure 9, the user may select a combination of area, subarea and up to four nouns to define a particular debate in which the user may have an interest. Selections for each of these columns is provide by a pull down menu or any other similar interface technique, such as alpha search. For example, under the area column, there may be provided a pull down menu which
25 identifies various geographical areas while under the subarea column there may be a pull down menu identifying various subareas within those geographical areas. As one example, under area can be listed countries and under subarea can be listed cities. As one illustration as set forth in Figure 9, it will be assumed that the user has selected the country Argentina under the area and the city Buenos Aires under the subarea.
30 There will then be provided a plurality of pull down menus under each of the columns labeled noun one, noun two, noun three and noun four. An example of such a pull

down menu is shown under the column noun four. It has been assumed that the user has selected football, cup and referee for nouns one, two and three respectively, as illustrated on the screen representation of Figure 9. If desired, the user may then go to the noun four column and select one of the nouns there. For example, accuracy, click on it and it would appear in the top bar immediately under noun four. It should however be understood that it is not necessary for the user to fill all four of the noun columns, nor is it necessary for the user to fill the area or subarea. This is merely by way of example to provide an illustration of the manner in which the user may select a subject upon which the user has an interest and would like to enter into a debate with regard to that subject should one exist. Once the user has filled in those columns as desired and as shown in Figure 9, the user will click on the Find button in the lower left hand corner of the screen as shown in Figure 9. This is further illustrated at 112 on Figure 10.

Upon clicking on the Find button, signals are transmitted to the program to cause it to query the database as shown at 116. The program, then, as illustrated at 118, queries the Debate database 120 to determine whether there are any existing debates which match one or more of the nouns in the selection criteria. If such a debates or debates exists as shown at 122, then the program determines if an exact match was found as illustrated at 123. If no exact match is found, the indication thereof is forwarded to the program activate Create Debate button at 124. If one or more debates are found matching one or more of the words entered on the search screen, then the program displays a list of debates 126 in Figure 11, similar to the screen in Figure 18. As will be recognized by those skilled in the art since the search is being conducted according to the various criteria such as area/subarea and up to four nouns selected by the user from the various pull down menus presented, there may be a plurality of debates which include one more of the nouns and the area and subarea which has been selected by the user. As a result, the screen 126 showing the list of debates may include a plurality of such debates which have been identified and retrieved from the database.

Such a list of debates retrieved which contain one or more of the search criteria displayed in Figure 9 is illustrated in Figure 18 to which reference is hereby

made. As is thereon shown there are 6 such debates illustrated dealing with such topics as football, cup and referee and the like. There may be more in different areas than can be displayed on this screen and the user can so determine by clicking on the Next button. If there are more they will replace those on the screen. Once the user

5 has found a debate of interest, the user may then through utilization of the mouse or keyboard as indicated at 128 (Figure 11), select the specific debate in which the user is interested by clicking on it. Once the user has clicked on the specific debate the database is again searched and all of the data for all of those opinions which have been posted which are applicable to the specific debate chosen by the user are

10 retrieved, including the briefs, but not the full opinion text, as is illustrated at 130. The data which is extracted at this step will include the rankings of the opinions and the indication according to specific color as above-referred to as to whether the user has read or not read and agreed or disagreed with the opinions represented by the various opinion symbols appearing on the screen. All of this information is

15 transmitted as shown to the user's screen 134 where such data is displayed for information and use by the user. The user may, from the information displayed on the screen 134, make various selections as illustrated at 136 through 146 (Figure 11).

By reference now to Figure 14 there is illustrated one way in which the various opinions may be displayed on the user's screen. As is therein shown a pyramid

20 similar to that shown in Figure 1a having a plurality of smaller pyramids or triangles (opinion symbols) disposed therein is preferable. Each of the triangles represents an opinion posted with respect to the debate selected. Each of the opinions is identified by a specific code to indicate whether the user has read the opinion, agreed or disagreed with it and whether the opinion was authored by the user. Preferably the

25 code is a color code. When the users selects the desired debate the representation shown on Figure 14 will display the top ranked 100 opinions relating to the debate. The user may by placing the cursor over a triangle obtain the brief of that opinion and such is displayed on the user's screen along with the name or alias of the author, along with the number of votes or approvals and the position relative to other opinions on

30 the same debate subject matter as is shown in Figure 14. If the cursor is moved to another triangle the brief for that opinion is displayed.

- As above discussed the triangles representing each of the debates may be assigned various colors to indicate criteria of that particular debate opinion with regard to the user, for example, a first color, such as blue, may be assigned to the triangle opinion symbol to represent that the particular user has not read that specific opinion. A second color, such for example as gold, may be assigned to those triangle opinion symbols which have been read and agreed with by the user. A third color, such as black, may be assigned to those opinion symbols representing opinions which have been read and not agreed with by that specific user. And a fourth color, such as red, may be assigned to the triangular opinion symbols which represent those opinions which have been written and posted by the user. Obviously other colors and/or codes may be chosen as desired. As is also indicated above, in the event that there are less than 100 opinions regarding the specific debate which has been chosen, the opinion symbols will remain empty or transparent indicating the lack of sufficient number of opinions to fill the pyramid.
- Assuming that the user has selected an opinion by clicking on a blue opinion symbol triangle (as shown at 136 (Figure 11)) the Debate program extracts the full opinion text from the database server as shown at 148 and displays on the user screen not only the brief of the opinion which has been selected, but also the opinion in full and the position ranking on the pyramid and the number of approvals, such is illustrated at 150 and also illustrated in Figure 12. It will also be noted that across the screen are the various criteria utilized to select the debate in this instance, football, cup and referee. The brief for the opinion which has been selected is, "The referee should not have called the penalty in the last minute of the match". The full opinion with regard to that brief is then set forth below the bar showing the position. As is noted at the bottom portion of the screen, the author is identified as John Doe and in the lower right portion of the area where the opinion is presented is given the date upon which that opinion was posted. As is shown by keyboard symbol 152 on Figure 13, to which reference is hereby made, the user now has an opportunity to agree with the opinion. If the user desires to do so, then such may be accomplished by clicking on the Agree button 152 and as shown in Figure 12. If the user agrees, such is fed to the program which updates database as shown at 156 to mark this particular opinion

as having been agreed upon by the user so that the rankings may be rearranged to take into consideration the new agreement.

If however, the user does not wish to agree with the opinion which has been read then the user will click on the Back button 160 which is also shown on the lower left portion of the screen at Figure 12. By clicking on the Back button the information appearing on the screen will be returned to the previous display, which in this instance will be the pyramid showing the opinion symbols. At the same time, the program will ascertain whether or not this particular opinion has been read by this particular user at a previous time as is illustrated at 162. If the opinion has not been read as is shown at 164, then the database as shown at 166 will be updated to recognize that this particular opinion has now been read by this user but has not been agreed with by this particular user. If, however, as is illustrated by the connection 168 the opinion has previously been read but not agreed with then the updating will be by passed since such is not necessary.

As is indicated above, if the Back button at 160 is clicked on by the user then the previous screen will be returned to which will be the pyramid showing the rankings for all of the opinions relating to the particular debate subject matter such as shown in Figure 14. The user may then again place the cursor over any of the filled triangle opinion symbols and have the brief of that opinion appear at the top of the screen above the pyramid along with its position, the author and the number of approvals.

As is also indicated on Figure 11, the user has other options and may instead of moving the cursor from symbol to symbol to view the briefs desire to view all of the briefs and if such is desired, he may click on view briefs as shown on Figure 14 and indicated at 142 on Figure 11. If such is clicked on then all of the briefs of all of the opinions existing on the debate pyramid which has been selected will be placed on the screen as is shown at 170 on Figure 11. Then as is shown on Figure 13 by the connector 12 appearing on both Figures 11 and 13, the user has an opportunity to select any one of the opinions by clicking on the opinion symbol representing that brief as shown at 172 and have that full opinion extracted from the database server as shown at 174 and displayed on the screen. The user then has the opportunity to agree

with the opinion if he or she has not agreed with it previously, as indicated at 176 and as shown by the existing opinion screen 150 which is apparent on both Figures 11 and 13. The ability to agree is shown at 152 in the upper portion of Figure 13 and as has been discussed above.

5 In the event that the opinion which has been selected at 172 (Figure 13) has been read and agreed with by the user previously as is indicated at 178 then that opinion is shown on the screen at 180 as having been agreed with. The user now has an opportunity as illustrated at 182 to click on the Withdraw my Agreement button which will automatically appear on the screen in place of the agree button. Thus, the
10 user has the opportunity to change the agreement previously expressed with regard to that opinion and if the user does so by clicking on the Withdraw Agreement button, then such is transmitted to update the database as shown at 186, to reduce the approval counter and make the changes needed in the ranking of the opinion.

Again referring to Figure 11 the user may also select to view only those briefs
15 which have been unread as illustrated at 144. Under those circumstances as shown at 190 the briefs of the unread opinions will be displayed on the user's screen. As also indicated by the off page connector 13 appearing on Figures 11 and 13, those briefs of unread opinions once displayed on the screen, will give the user an opportunity to select a particular opinion by placing the cursor thereon and clicking it as is shown at
20 193. That will then cause the entire opinion for the brief which has been clicked to be extracted from the Debate's database server as shown at 195 and displayed on the opinion screen as shown at 150. Again, as previously discussed the user will have an opportunity to agree with the opinion by clicking on the agree button as shown at 152 in Figure 13. This will be followed by updating of the database as has previously
25 been described.

As shown at 140 on Figure 11, the user also has the opportunity to place the cursor on one of those symbols for opinions which have been previously read and agreed upon such, for example as a gold triangle, as is illustrated at 140. When such occurs the opinion which has been now clicked on will be extracted from the database
30 as shown at 192 and displayed upon the screen as shown at 194. This will provide the opportunity for the user to withdraw the agreement previously given to this particular

opinion as illustrated by the symbol with the off page connector 11 appearing on both Figures 11 and 13 as illustrated at 182 and as above described.

- Also as indicated on Figure 11 at 138, the user may by placing the cursor upon the symbol appearing on Figure 14 having the color corresponding to the user's own opinion, such for example as a red triangle, and clicking thereon may cause the opinion which the user has generated and posted to be extracted from the Debate's database as shown at 196 on Figure 11 and to be displayed upon the screen as shown at 198 on Figure 11. As illustrated by the appearance of the off page connector 10 on both Figures 11 and 13 the user now has an opportunity as is shown at 200 on Figure 13 to change the authorship. The change of authorship may be from the actual name of the author, assuming that the previously posted opinion bears that, to an alias or from the alias to the actual name of the author depending upon the circumstances. For example, if the original opinion posted by the author was such that the author had some doubts as to whether he or she wished to be directly identified by name, then the alias would have been used. If a large number of agreements were posted by others with respect to that particular opinion, the author may now wish to change from the alias to the author's name so that appropriate credit would be received in the Debate's community for that particular opinion which has received good acceptance. Obviously, the reverse may be true if the author has used his or her real name to post the opinion and finds that it receives nothing but disagreements, the author may then wish to change the authorship from his or her real name to an alias. When such has occurred the change will be conveyed by clicking on the back button in 202 to the database to update it according to the change of name, if in fact such has occurred in 204.
- Returning again to Figure 10, if the list of debates found by the query turns out to be zero, that is, there are no existing debates conforming to the area, subarea and any of the four nouns which have been selected, such will be indicated by the NO, as shown by 280. The screen will then display a Create debate button as illustrated at 282. When the Create debate button is clicked (204 on Figures 10 and 11) then the subject matter is added to the database as shown at 206 and the empty debate pyramid screen is provided as shown at 208 on Figure 11. At this point the user may now enter

- his or her opinion with regard to the New Debate subject which has been generated and entered in the database as shown at 206. Once the new debate has been generated then the user may click on the Add Opinion button as shown at 146 and the opinion will appear on the add opinion screen as shown at 210 on Figure 11. As is shown by
- 5 the off page connector 14 and the symbols appearing on Figures 11 and 13 after clicking on the Add Opinion button the add opinion screen appearing at 210 is activated and the user then has the opportunity through utilization of the keyboard to generate the brief, the actual full text of the opinion, select either the user's alias or name, whichever the user desires, and then to click upon the Add Opinion button.
- 10 When the Add Opinion button is clicked on, as is shown at 212 then the database is updated as shown at 214 with the new opinion, brief and the other data related to it.
- By reference again to Figure 10, at the same time the create Debate button 282 is illustrated on the screen, there will also be provided to the user as shown at 216 an additional button indicated as find again to enable the search to be initiated again. As
- 15 is illustrated by the off page connector 7 on Figures 5 and 10, a further search of the Debate's database with regard to the various Debate subject matter is activated. This function returns the user to the previous screen which will be the screen as shown in Figure 9 which will enable the user to alter some or all of the search subject matter and to then again initiate the search.
- 20 Referring again to Figure 8 which illustrates various other areas of search which the user has available other than by subject matter, which has been described above. As is illustrated on Figure 7 the user has an opportunity to search by the author of the opinion as shown at 220, by the date of the opinion as is shown at 222 by searching only the author's debates, that is my debates as shown at 224, by searching
- 25 only new debates as shown at 226 and this would be those debates which have been authored since the previous inquiry with regard to such debate or by the hottest debates as shown at 228. The hottest debates would be those debates which have the greatest amount of activity. If the user clicks on my debates, new debates or hottest debates as shown at 224, 226 or 228 then a query is sent to the debates database as
- 30 shown at 230 regarding which of these search criteria has been activated. For example, if the my debates search criteria 224 has been clicked on by the user then the

- database is queried to identify all of those debates created by the user and these are then displayed on the screen 126 as shown in Figure 11 and as indicated by the common numeral 6 appearing in both places. On the other hand, if the new debates is clicked upon as shown at 226 then the query to the database is to extract all of those
- 5 debates which have been authored and posted since the last time the database was searched and these are listed on the screen 126 as shown in Figure 11. Alternatively, if the hottest debate 228 is clicked on by the user then the query to the database is to extract that debate which has been visited most frequently and that debate would then be displayed on the screen 126 as shown in Figure 11.
- 10 In the event the user clicks on the search button to search by author as shown at 220 in Figure 7, then the user will be queried, as shown at 232, whether he or she wishes to make the search by name, by alias or by ranking. As is illustrated by following off page connector 4 which appears on Figure 7 and also on Figure 15, to which reference is hereby made, the user may select either the name as at 234, the
- 15 alias as shown at 236 or the ranking as shown at 238. If, for example, the user clicks on search by name, then the user is presented with additional choices of the search criteria through the utilization of a pull down menu or input fields or other similar techniques. In this instance choices such as area, subarea, last name, and first name are presented. As shown at 240, the user then will select from the pull down menu the
- 20 name search criteria as illustrated at 242 and then activate the query to the database as shown at 246. The Debates database in response to this query will provide the information requested and as indicated by following the connector 6 on Figures 15 and 11 will provide that information which will be listed on the user screen 126. This information will be a list of all of the Debates which respond to the query according to
- 25 name as submitted by the user. The user may then click on a specific debate as shown at 128 and the display debate pyramid will be displayed on the screen as shown at 134 after extracting from the database all of the opinions posted for that selected debate. The user may then continue by selecting the full opinions based upon briefs that can be displayed simply by moving the cursor through the opinion symbols appearing on
- 30 the pyramid on the screen all as has been described in conjunction with Figure 11.

By selecting the alias 236 option, a similar search criteria such as area,

subarea, and alias may be provided as is shown at 248 on Figure 15. A similar process occurs by picking the alias search criteria as shown at 250. This initiates a query to the database as shown at 252 and then the display of the information as extracted on the user screen 126 as shown at Figure 11 with additional operational capabilities as above described with regard to the name search.

Similarly, if the user chooses ranking 238 and area and subarea 254 is provided allowing the user through the pull down menu to select as desired. As illustrated at 256 the database is then queried to obtain the top authors in the selected area and subarea as shown at 258. These authors are then ranked in ascending order with the one having the most opinions which have been agreed with at the top. As is shown at 260, the user may now select the author desired and reinitiate the search by authors name as above-described. Alternatively, if the authors, as displayed are not satisfactory to the user then the back button may be activated and the user is returned to the previous screen permitting a selection by area and subarea for ranking of additional authors. The user may also be provided the ability to search by date as indicated at 222 on Figure 7. When that button is activated there will be displayed on the user screen 262 various search criteria such as last week, the last two weeks, last month, last six months or last year and as is also indicated on the screen at 262 there will be a custom button. As illustrated at 264 (Figure 16) the custom button may be activated to provide the opportunity for the user to provide custom entries. If however a preset choice, as shown at 266, is clicked on then a query is sent to the debate database, depending upon the specific criteria selected such as last week to retrieve all of the debates created during that particular time as shown at 268, this information once retrieved is then, as is indicated by the off page connector 6 is listed on the user screen 126 as shown in Figure 11 with the opportunity for the user to utilize those debates and select particular opinions as above described.

Alternatively, if the user clicks upon the custom screen then the user is allowed to enter on a specific screen a range of dates during which debates may have been created and to have those debates identified for the user in 270. For example, such a screen may be that as shown at Figure 17. Once such information has been entered as shown at 272 the database is queried as shown at 274 to extract those

debates generated between those dates selected and to provide them to the user screen 126 as shown in Figure 11 again with the option for the user to utilize the information so presented to select a particular debate and then opinions with respect thereto.

- There has thus been described a system and method for ranking opinions
- 5 within a predetermined defined subject matter and by displaying information related to those opinions on a computer display screen and to allow a qualified and identified individual access to that information to allow him or her to read the opinions specify agreement or disagreement therewith and to then compare all such agreements to accomplish ranking of the opinions relating to a particular subject matter according to
- 10 the number of agreements with regard to those opinions. The system and method effectively presents an opportunity for individuals irrespective of geographical location to engage into active and interactive debate regarding particular subjects matter which may be of interest to those individuals.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for ranking opinions within predetermined defined subject matter and providing information relative to such ranking by a computer including a display screen comprising the steps of:
 - 5 (1) establishing a predetermined defined subject matter upon which opinions may be rendered;
 - (2) providing a means for identifying individuals who are qualified to have access to opinions relating to such predetermined defined subject matter;
 - (3) allowing such identified and qualified individual to access said
 - 10 opinions relating to such predetermined predefined subject matter;
 - (4) providing a means for each such identified and qualified individual to read opinions posted regarding such predetermined defined subject matter;
 - (5) providing means for each such individual reading each such
 - 15 opinions to specify an agreement or disagreement therewith;
 - (6) comparing each specified agreement with each opinion to specified agreements with every other opinion within the predetermined defined subject matter; and
 - (7) ranking all of the opinions relative to each other according to
 - 20 the number of specified agreements rendered by those reading the opinions by displaying such rankings on said screen in at least two dimensions.
2. The method as defined in claim 1 which includes the further step of recording in a computer database each designated agreement with respect to each such opinion.
- 25 3. The method as defined in claim 2 which includes the further step of recording in said database the results of each comparison and ranking of each opinion.
4. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing

means for each identified and qualified individual to render an opinion about said predetermined defined subject matter and to make said rendered opinion available to other identified and qualified individuals.

5. The method as defined in claim 4 which further includes providing
5 means for each such other identified and qualified individual to specify an agreement or disagreement with said rendered opinion.

6. The method as defined in claim 5 wherein each such agreement or disagreement with respect to said rendered opinion is compared with the specified agreements or disagreements with every other opinion and said rendered opinion is
10 ranked with all other opinions relative to the number of specified agreements therewith.

7. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing means for each identified and qualified individual to define a subject matter about which an opinion is to be rendered.
- 15 8. The method as defined in claim 7 wherein the means for defining a subject matter is limited to the utilization of nouns only.

9. The method as defined in claim 7 wherein the method for defining a subject matter is limited by a listing of predefined subject matter upon which opinions can be rendered.

- 20 10. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing means for such identified and qualified individual to access said opinions according to the author of the opinions.

11. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing means for such identified and qualified individual to access said opinions according to
25 the date of the opinions.

12. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing means for such identified and qualified individual to access said opinions according to the new debates upon which opinions can be rendered.
13. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing means for such identified and qualified individual to access said opinions according to the geographical area of the predetermined defined subject matter.
14. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing means for such each identified and qualified individual to obtain an abstract of an opinion which such identified and qualified individual has accessed.
- 10 15. The method as defined in claim 14 which further includes providing means for said identified and qualified individual to obtain the full opinion of said abstracted opinion.
16. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes providing means for each identified and qualified individual to withdraw agreement which said identified and qualified individual has previously specified regarding previously accessed opinions.
- 15 17. The method as defined in claim 16 which further includes providing means for re-ranking all of the opinions relative to each other upon the withdrawal of said agreement by said identified and qualified individual.
18. The method as defined in claim 7 which further includes providing means for storing each activity with respect to each opinion regarding each subject matter.
- 20 19. The method as defined in claim 18 which further includes providing means for each identified and qualified individual to access said subject matter according to the one which has received the largest amount of activity by all said
- 25

identified and qualified individuals.

20. The method as defined in claim 19 wherein said means for storing also includes means for storing each title of each subject matter upon which opinions may be rendered.

5 21. The method as defined in claim 20 which further includes providing means for each identified and qualified individual to define a subject matter about which an opinion is to be rendered by a utilization of nouns only.

22. The method as defined in claim 21 which further includes providing means for comparing said nouns chosen by said identified and qualified individual
10 with titles of subject matter upon which opinions have been rendered to determine whether or not a predetermined defined subject matter conforming to one or more of said nouns already exists and providing to said identified and qualified individual an indication thereof.

23. The method as defined in claim 22 which includes providing means for
15 each identified and qualified individual to create a new subject matter upon which opinions can be rendered in the event there is no correspondence between the nouns chosen and the subject matter previously in existence.

24. The method as defined in claim 1 which further includes representing each opinion relating to said predetermined subject matter by an opinion symbol and
20 displaying all of said symbols on said computer screen

25. The method as defined in claim 25 which further includes assigning a code to each such symbol which code defines the status of each such opinion relative to such identified and qualified individual.

26. The method as defined in claim 25 wherein said code is defined by a
25 plurality of colors with each color representing a predetermined status.

27. The method as defined in claim 26 wherein a first color represents an opinion rendered by said identified and qualified individual.

28. The method as defined in claim 27 wherein a second color represents an opinion of another which has been read and agreed with by said identified and
5 qualified individual.

29. The method as defined in claim 28 wherein a third color represents an opinion of another which has been read and disagreed with by said identified and qualified individual.

30. The method as defined in claim 29 wherein a fourth color represents an
10 opinion of another which has not been read by said identified and qualified individual

31. The method as defined in claim 27 wherein said first color is red.

32. The method as defined in claim 28 wherein said second color is gold.

33. The method as defined in claim 29 wherein said third color is black.

34. The method as defined in claim 30 wherein said fourth color is blue.

15 35. A system for ranking opinions within a predetermined defined subject matter and providing information relative to such ranking comprising:

a database for storing said opinions and information relative to each
such

opinion;

20 a personal computer for use by a subscriber;
a web server;

means for interconnecting said database, said personal computer and
said web server to allow said subscriber to view an opinion on said subject matter

resident in said database and to register agreement therewith;

means for comparing the total number of agreements with said opinion by all subscribers to the total number of agreements for each other opinion relative to said subject matter resident in said data base;

- 5 means for ranking said opinions according to the number of agreements therewith registered in said database; and

means for displaying said ranking on said subscribers personal computer.

36. A system as defined in claim 35 wherein said means for
10 interconnecting comprises an intranet.

37. A system as defined in claim 35 wherein said means for interconnecting comprises the internet.

38. A system as defined in claim 35 wherein said personal computer comprises a web browser.

- 15 39. A system as defined in claim 38 wherein said web browser comprises an applet and said web server comprises a servlet.

40. A system as defined in claim 35 which further includes a plurality of databases, a plurality of personal computers and a plurality of web servers.

- 20 41. A system as defined in claim 39 wherein said means for interconnecting comprises a first balancing device interconnecting said plurality of personal computers and said plurality of web servers.

42. A system as defined in claim 40 wherein said means for interconnecting comprises a second balancing device for interconnecting said plurality of web servers and said plurality of databases.

43. A system as defined in claim 41 wherein each said web server further includes cache means for temporarily storing preselected data for use by said subscriber without accessing said database.

44. A system as defined in claim 39 wherein said plurality of databases are
5 mirrored databases.

45. A system as defined in claim 35 which further includes means for searching opinions according to a preselected criteria.

46. A system as defined in claim 35 which further includes a means for generating a debate topic.

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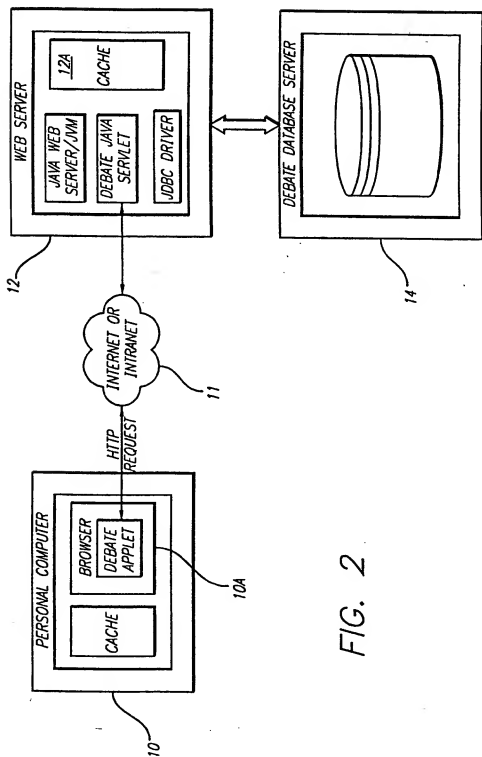
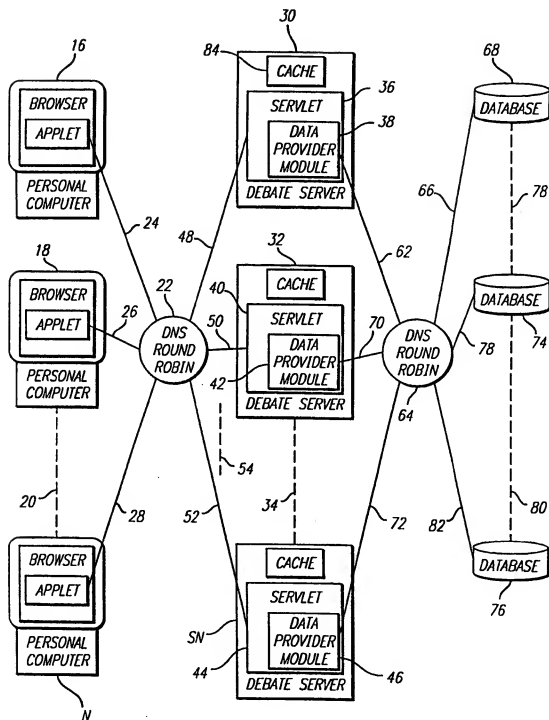


FIG. 2

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FIG. 3



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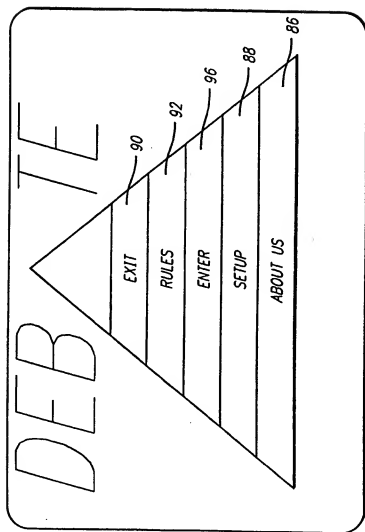
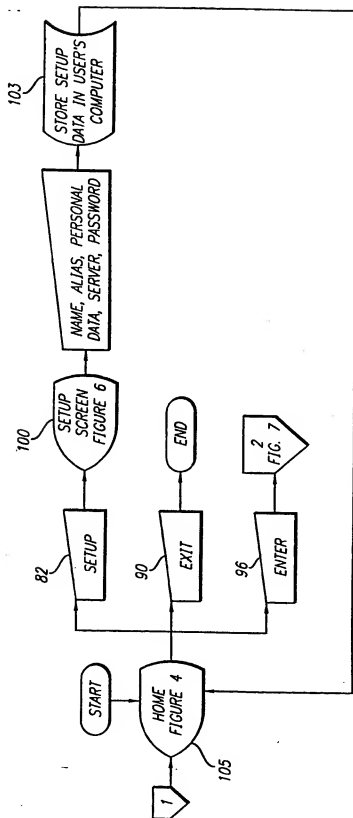


FIG. 4

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FIG. 5



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FIG. 6

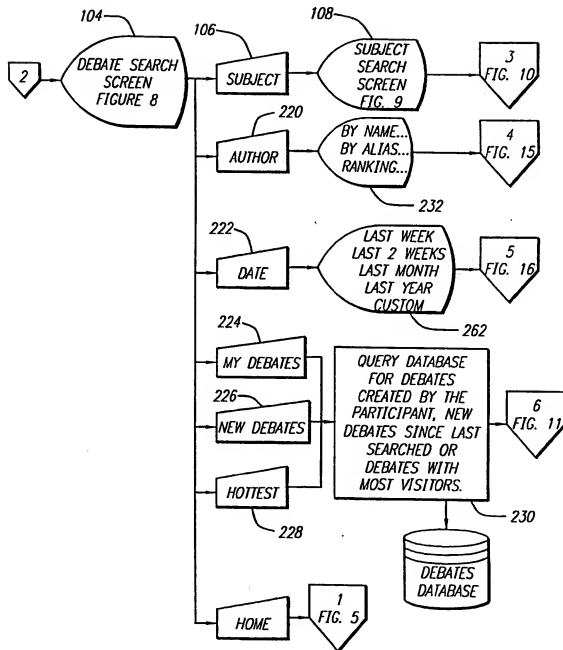
101

FIRST NAME	JOHN	ALIAS	JACK
LAST NAME	DOE	COUNTRY	US
E-MAIL	JDOE@XXX.COM	ZIP CODE	90292
BIRTHDAY	15/5/51	MALE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X FEMALE <input type="checkbox"/>
SERVER	DEBATES.COM	PASSWORD	*****

OK CANCEL

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FIG. 7



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FIG. 8

BY SUBJECT	BY AUTHOR	BY DATE	MY DEBATES	NEW DEBATES	HOTTEST
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FIG. 9

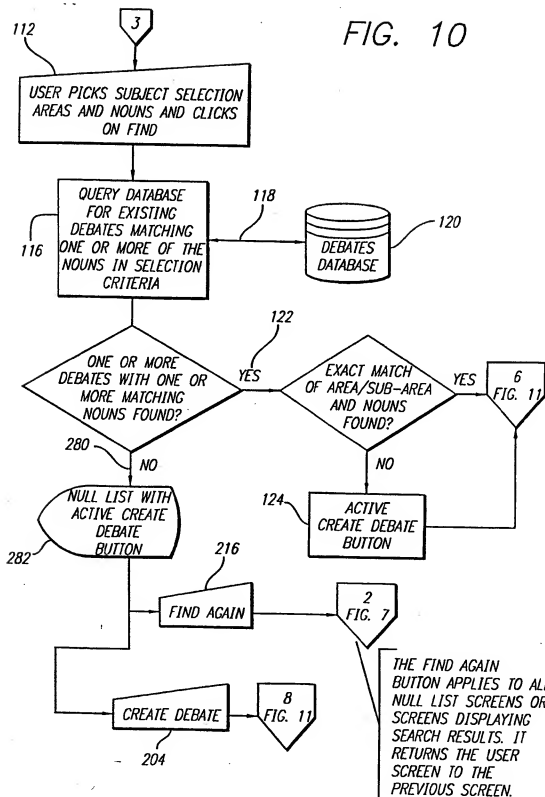
AREA	SUB AREA	NOUN 1	NOUN 2	NOUN 3	NOUN4
ARGENTINA	BUENOS AIRES	FOOTBALL	CUP	REFEREE	
					ACCESSORY
					ACCIDENT
					ACCORD
					ACCOUNT
					ACCOMPLICE
					ACCURACY

FIND

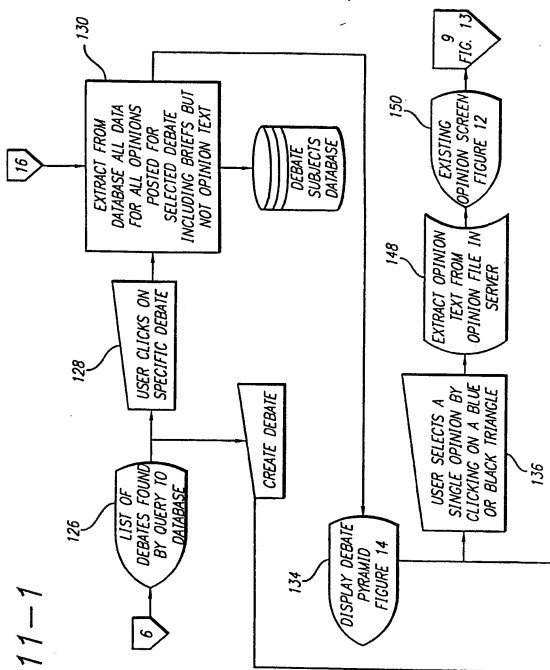
BACK

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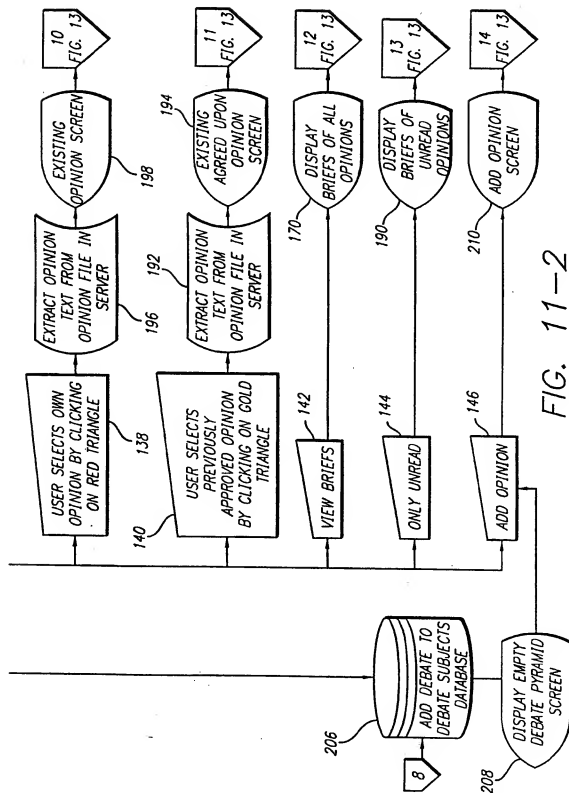
FIG. 10



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FIG. 12

ARGENTINA	BUENOS AIRES	FOOTBALL	CUP	REFEREE	
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THE REFEREE SHOULD NOT HAVE CALLED THE PENALTY IN THE LAST MINUTE OF THE MATCH.

POSITION 7 AUTHOR: JOHN DOE APPROVALS 9

A REFEREE WHO CALLS A PENALTY IN THE LAST MINUTE OF A DECISIVE MATCH SHOULD DO SO ONLY WHEN IT IS A CLEAR PENALTY. IN THE CASE OF THE FINAL MATCH FOR THE FOOTBALL CUP THIS WAS NOT THE CASE.

1998-05-15

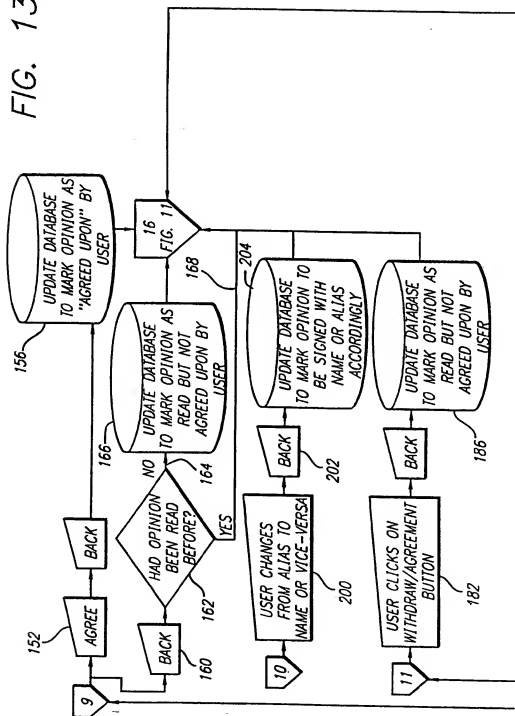
BACK

AGREE

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FIG. 13-1



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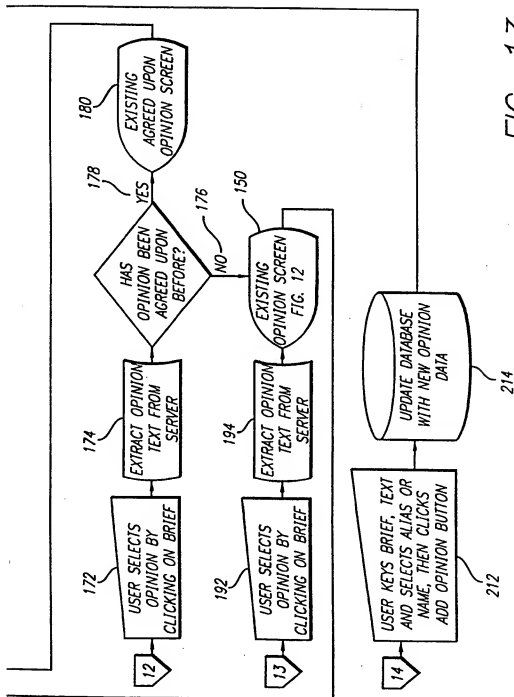
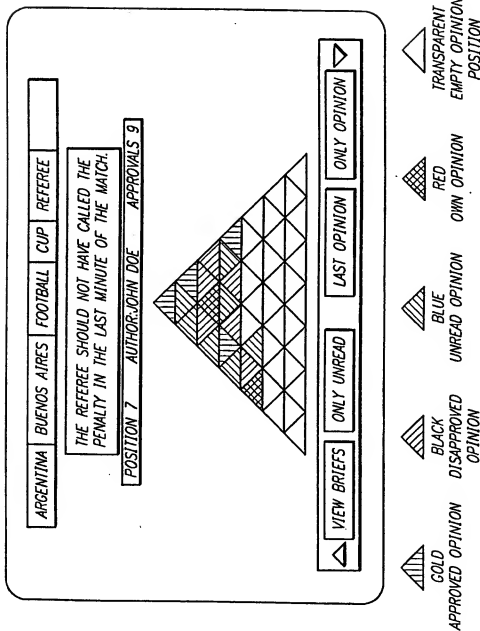


FIG. 13-2

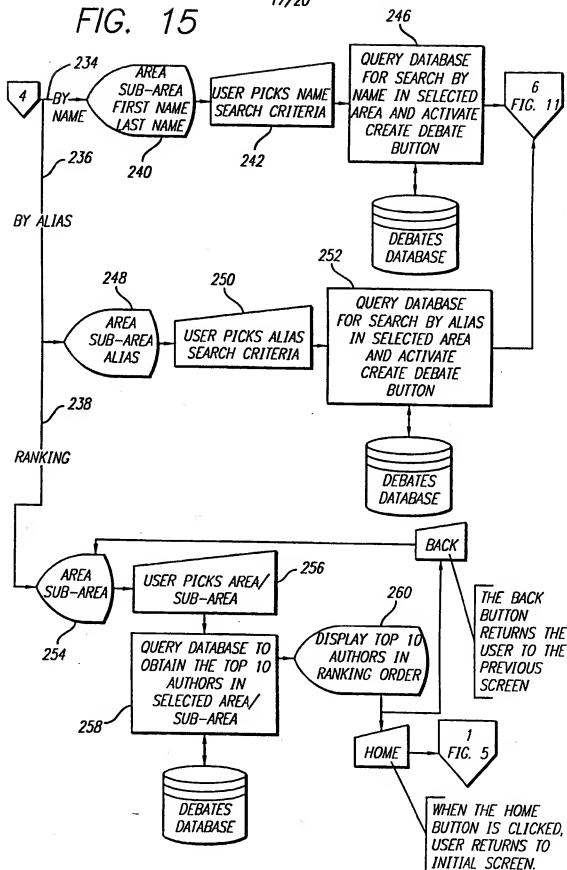
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FIG. 14



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FIG. 15



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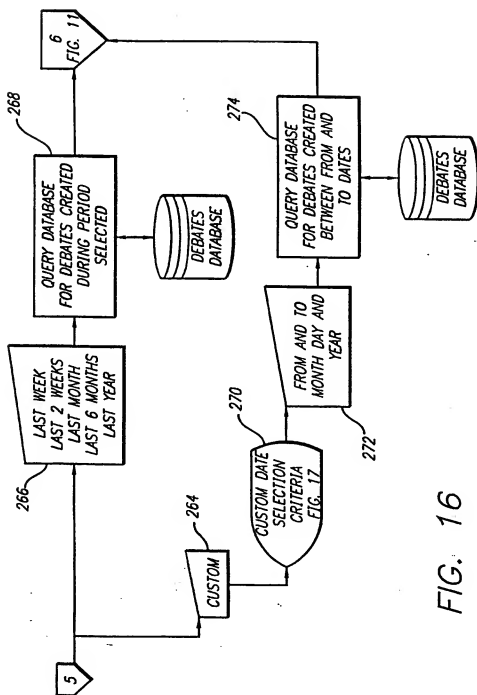


FIG. 16

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FIG. 17

BY SUBJECT	BY AUTHOR	BY DATE	MY DEBATES	NEW DEBATES	HOTTEST
FROM MONTH	MAY	DAY	15	YEAR	1998
TO MONTH	OCTOBER	DAY	2	YEAR	1998
<input type="button" value="FIND"/>					<input type="button" value="HOME"/>

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FIG. 18

ARGENTINA	BUENOS AIRES	FOOTBALL	CUP	REFEREE
		FOOTBALL		
USA		FOOTBALL	CUP	
FRANCE		CUP	REFEREE	
		REFEREE		
USA		CUP		

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No.

PCT/US 99/21201

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 607C13/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 607C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X Y	<p>WO 98 04083 A (KLINGMAN EDWIN E) 29 January 1998 (1998-01-29) abstract</p> <p>page 4, line 13 -page 5, line 5 page 5, line 24 -page 6, line 24 page 8, line 33 -page 13, line 10 page 22, line 22 -page 23, line 7 figures 3-6</p> <p>--- -/--</p>	<p>1-5, 10, 11, 35-43 6-9, 12, 16-34, 44-46</p>



Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.



Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

- "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- "E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
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- "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

8 February 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

15/02/2000

Name and mailing address of the ISA

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Miltgen, E

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 99/21201

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	EP 0 823 688 A (HITACHI LTD) 11 February 1998 (1998-02-11)	6-9, 12, 18-23, 44-46
A	abstract column 1, line 3 -column 3, line 48 column 4, line 40 -column 8, line 37 figures 1-4	1-5, 35-43
Y	FR 2 686 992 A (LAMOTTE D INCAMPS FRANCOIS) 6 August 1993 (1993-08-06)	24-34
A	abstract page 2, line 5 - line 32 page 4, line 17 -page 7, line 15 figures 1-3	1, 35
Y	US 5 400 248 A (CHISHOLM JOHN D) 21 March 1995 (1995-03-21)	16, 17
A	abstract column 2, line 65 -column 6, line 56 column 8, line 16 - line 25 column 9, line 33 - line 50 figures 1-3, 5, 8	1-6, 35
A	US 5 371 673 A (FAN DAVID P) 6 December 1994 (1994-12-06) abstract column 3, line 52 - line 68 column 6, line 4 -column 7, line 20 claims; figures 1-8	1-46
A	US 5 117 358 A (WINKLER PETER M) 26 May 1992 (1992-05-26) abstract; claims; figures	1, 35

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/US 99/21201

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WO 9804083 A	29-01-1998	US 5950172 A US 5799285 A	07-09-1999 25-08-1998
EP 0823688 A	11-02-1998	JP 10049581 A	20-02-1998
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